

Louisa May Alcott — Realistic Child of the Concord Renaissance

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ルイザ・メイ・オルコット — コンコード・ルネッサンスの現実主義的落し子

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1994年、清泉女学院短期大学のドラマセミナーの学生達がルイザ・メイ・オルコットの代表作「若草物語」を脚色し、上演することになった。このことが、彼女の作品と時代について調べ、マサチューセッツ州コンコード（当時の超絶主義の中心地）にある彼女の故郷へ文学巡礼の旅をするきっかけとなった。ルイザ・メイ・オルコットは、今は少女小説の作家であると思われているが、純文学を書く作家でもあり、また収入を得るための作品も書いた現実主義的作家でもあった。

Introduction

In 1994, the students in my Drama Seminar at Seisen Jogakuin College chose to write and perform a play based on Louisa May Alcott's most famous work, *Little Women*. This project led to an investigation into her life and times and a literary pilgrimage to her former home in Concord, Massachusetts, both of which will be discussed in this report.

The Place of Louisa May Alcott in American Literature

Louisa May Alcott lived for much of her life in Concord, Massachusetts, where her father, Bronson Alcott, was active as one of the leaders of the nineteenth century Transcendentalist movement. Among his friends were three of the major American writers of the day, Ralph Waldo Emerson, author of *Nature*, Henry David Thoreau,

who wrote *Walden*, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, who is best known for his novel *The Scarlet Letter*. The presence of these men in Concord drew others of like mind, and the time and place have become known to history as "The Concord Renaissance". Although Louisa admired and was influenced by her father and the Transcendentalists, she herself was a realist of the first order. She, too, became a writer, and equally famous in her own way.

Louisa May Alcott wrote poetry, sensational short stories, and serious novels for adults, but she is best known for her works for children. These were written during the flowering of children's literature in the nineteenth century, a period when many of the classics of the genre were produced, including Mary Mapes Dodge's *Hans Brinker ; or the Silver Skates* (1865) and Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* (1876) in America, and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1877), and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883) in England.

Until that time, children and adults basically read the same things, the Bible, almanacs, and books such as William Caxton's edition of *Aesop's Fables* (1483), John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). Children in England and America loved the fantasy in European works which had been translated into English: *The Tales of Mother Goose* (from French in 1729), *Popular German Stories* by the Brothers Grimm (from German in 1823), and Hans Christian Andersen's *Fairy Tales and Stories* (from Danish in 1846). Works for children of the same period which were written in English, however, tended to be extremely instructive and moralistic. Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women, Part I* (1868) is considered to be a landmark in the history of children's literature because her portrayal of the daily lives of four teenage sisters set a new trend, in which books for children became realistic and entertaining. The book sold more than 60,000 copies in its first year, and brought Alcott immediate fame and fortune. Since then, it has never been out of print, and continues to be one of the most popular novels for young girls.

New England and Transcendentalism

Louisa May Alcott spent most of her life in New England (the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont), an important area in American history. The Pilgrims settled in Massachusetts in 1620, the

American Revolution started there in 1775, and Boston, its capital, has always been New England's most important city. Descendants of the seventeenth and eighteenth century English Puritan settlers have dominated New England's population. The "Yankees", as the people were called, were characterized by a strong belief in God, hard work, frugality, and a talent for making the best of any situation. The population remained basically English until the 1840's, when the potato famine in Ireland caused thousands of Irish to emigrate to New England to work in the mills. After the Civil War (1861-65), blacks began to move north, and then waves of immigrants from the countries of southern, eastern, and northern Europe followed during the rest of the nineteenth century.

Alcott was born in 1832, just fifty-six years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, when Americans were still concerned about their relationship to the countries of Europe, especially England. Culturally, however, they were beginning to mature, and during the nineteenth century, a literature which was distinctly American in theme, character, and setting emerged in New England. Transcendentalism was one of the results of the intellectual ferment of the early nineteenth century. Though it is "essentially indigenous" to New England, transcendentalism is a hybrid philosophy fed by many streams of thought.

The prevailing Christian sect of the time in Boston was Unitarianism, which had in turn arisen as a reaction to orthodox Calvinism in the late eighteenth century. The Unitarians, who had been battling the conservative establishment for thirty years, were outraged when the Transcendentalists presented their challenge, especially because many of these men had been their students at Harvard College and had become ministers of their churches. The liberal Unitarians considered the liberal Transcendentalists to be "infidels".

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "the sage of Concord", a Harvard-educated ex-Unitarian minister, lecturer par excellence, and prolific writer of poetry and prose, can best explain their philosophy :

What is popularly called Transcendentalism among us, is Idealism ; Idealism as it appears in 1842. As thinkers, mankind has ever been divided into two sects, Materialists and Idealists ; the first class founding on experience, the second on consciousness ; the first class beginning to think from the data of the senses, the second class perceive that the senses are not final, and say, The

senses give us representations of things, but what are the things themselves, they cannot tell. The materialist insists on facts, on history, on the force of circumstances and the animal wants of man; the Idealist on the power of Thought and of Will, on inspiration, on miracle, on individual culture. These two modes of thinking are both natural, but the idealist contends is in higher nature. . . . This way of thinking, falling on Roman times, made Stoic philosophers; falling on despotic times, made patriotic Catos and Brutuses; falling on superstitious times, made prophets and apostles; on popish times, made protestants and aescetic monks; preachers of Faith against preachers of Works; on prelatical times, made Puritans and Quakers; and falling on Unitarianism and commercial times, makes the peculiar shades of Idealism which we know. (Emerson, pp. 329-30 and 339)

The Transcendentalists were intensely interested in the life of the mind, and they were preoccupied with releasing man's spiritual and moral life from history. They expressed their disagreement with the current philosophy on three major points: 1) in literature they favored Carlyle and Goethe, 2) in philosophy they followed the transcendentalism of Kant (which they took as their name), as opposed to the empiricism of Locke, and 3) in religion they denied the existence of miracles, preferring Christianity to rest upon the spirit of Christ rather than upon His supposed deeds, as was the belief of the Unitarians. They believed in the innate divinity of man and nature and the power of intuition as a means of attaining truth. They were also interested in certain aspects of Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, and other non-Western teachings.

The Transcendental Club was organized in September, 1836, and often met at Emerson's house. Its members were most concerned with intellectual development, but they also participated in communal experimentation and social reform. The Transcendentalists were fiercely individual at heart, and they never developed a really effective organization. They did, however, publish a magazine, *The Dial*, from 1840 to 1844, and some of them (including Nathaniel Hawthorne) lived at Brook Farm, the Utopian community founded by members of the Transcendental Club at West Roxbury, Massachusetts, that lasted from 1841 to 1847.

Louisa May Alcott's Family Life

Louisa's father, Bronson Alcott, was born in Wolcott, Connecticut in 1799. He was the son of a flax farmer, and had little formal education, but he became well-known as an educational reformer and Transcendentalist. In 1830, Bronson married Abigail May of Boston, who was a descendant on her mother's side of the distinguished Quincy and Sewall families of New England. Abigail's great-aunt, Dorothy Quincy, was the Revolutionary belle who married John Hancock, the first governor of Massachusetts.

The couple had four daughters. The first two, Anna Bronson Alcott (1831) and Louisa May Alcott (1832, on her father's thirty-third birthday) were born in Germantown (now a part of Philadelphia), Pennsylvania, where Bronson was the director of a school for small children. Their third child, Elizabeth Sewall Alcott (1835), was born in Boston, and their last child, Abigail May Alcott, known as "May", (1840), was born in Concord.

In many ways, Bronson Alcott's ideas on child-centered education were ahead of their time. He believed that the instructor should "... look to the child to see what is to be done, rather than to his book or system. The Child is the Book. The operations of his mind are the true system." (Dapper, 1993, p. 26) He favored the conversational method of instruction and encouraged his students to use their imaginations. By beautifying the school surroundings and introducing such innovations as organized play, gymnastics, and the honor system, he encouraged the harmonious development of the physical, intellectual, aesthetic, and moral natures of his pupils. He is best known for two schools that he founded. One was the Temple School in Boston, an outstanding failure, that nevertheless led him to the Transcendentalists; the other was The Concord School of Philosophy, an outstanding success.

The Temple School, based on Bronson's principles of education, lasted from 1834 to 1840. Bronson's assistants were Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, who later opened the first kindergarten in the USA, and Margaret Fuller, future editor of *The Dial*. In 1836-37 Bronson published the two volumes of his *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*. These books won him the attention and respect of men like Ralph Waldo Emerson, but shocked the parents of his pupils, who considered his ideas dangerous and highly improper, and promptly removed their children from the school. Soon after, he

founded another school, which also failed after he admitted a black child. This was the last steady job and income Bronson had during Louisa's childhood.

Bronson's most successful educational venture was The Concord School of Philosophy, a summer school for adults. He and Emerson had long dreamed of opening a school to encourage new trends in American thought, and both lived to see their dream realized nearly forty years later. It was considered a milestone in American educational history because it encouraged original, creative thought and was a forerunner of modern summer schools and extension classes. It opened in 1879, when Bronson was nearly eighty, and flourished for nine summers. Classes, which consisted of a lecture followed by a "conversation" on the topic between the speaker and the class, were held morning and afternoon for an average of five weeks. A lively social life was also enjoyed by the participants, including excursions to historic sites in the area and tea parties. The school drew people from all over the US and Europe, many of whom Bronson had met on the lecture tours he made during his later years.

Louisa and her sisters were almost entirely educated at home by their father, though later they received some guidance from Emerson and Thoreau. Louisa's official career as an author began with the publication of poetry and stories in popular magazines, but in a sense, she had been writing all her life. Bronson had his daughters keep diaries from an early age, which he and his wife read and discussed with them. He did not believe in corporal punishment, but disciplined his daughters through the medium of writing. He also kept extensive journals in which he made notes of their progress.

Bronson was interested in the Transcendentalist Brook Farm community, which was founded in 1841, but the Alcotts never lived there. In 1842, Bronson made a trip to England, which was financed by Emerson, to visit an Alcott House that had been founded to experiment with his ideas. He returned home with Charles Lane, with the idea of founding a Utopian community based on principles of vegetarianism, communal work, and learning. In June, 1843, when Louisa was ten years old, the Alcotts moved with Charles Lane, his son, and several other people to Fruitlands in Harvard, Massachusetts, where they became a "consociate family". This experiment in communal living lasted about seven months. Bronson suffered a nervous breakdown, and he considered leaving his family to join a Shaker community in upper New York State with Lane. In the end, he decided to stay home, but these events had a profound effect on his relationship with his wife and daughters.

Until the success of *Little Women* brought them financial security in 1868, the family had to live on whatever Mrs. Alcott and their daughters were able to earn and donations from relatives and friends. As a result, they were constantly in debt and had to move frequently. Louisa's mother increasingly relied on her for financial and emotional support. As soon as she was able, Louisa worked to help support her family. American society offered little opportunity to women seeking employment in those days. Louisa had a variety of jobs, as a seamstress, household servant, governess, teacher, actress, nurse, and companion to an invalid on a tour of Europe.

In the winter of 1862, Louisa was thirty, the age at which a single Victorian woman officially became a spinster. The Civil War had begun the year before, and Louisa went to Georgetown to serve as a nurse at the Union Hotel Hospital. After about six weeks, she fell ill with typhoid fever, which was treated with calomel (Hg₂ Cl₂). Unfortunately, it was improperly administered, and she suffered the effects of mercury poisoning. Louisa, who had enjoyed robust health until that time, returned to Concord with her health permanently ruined.

Of the four sisters, only Anna and May ever married. Anna was married in 1860, on their parent's thirtieth wedding anniversary, to John Bridge Pratt. The marriage was very happy, and they had two sons, Frederick and John. May was married in 1878 in London to Ernest Nieriker, a Swiss businessman, but she died the following year in Paris only a few weeks after giving birth to a daughter, Louisa May Nieriker. Before her death, she asked Louisa to take care of the child. Louisa's niece, "Lulu" arrived in the United States in 1880, and she assumed the tasks of motherhood at the age of forty-eight. Elizabeth died in 1858, at the age of twenty-two, from the aftereffects of scarlet fever. Louisa dedicated herself to the care and support of her family, having claimed after Anna's wedding, "I'd rather be a free spinster and paddle my own canoe." (Dapper, 1993, p.12)

Bronson has been described as serene, otherworldly, and idealistic. His friend Emerson said of him, "As pure intellect I have never seen his equal." (Hart, p.16) Louisa, on the other hand, once described him as a "man up in a balloon, with his family and friends holding the ropes which confine him to earth, and trying to haul him down." (Plott, p. 237) Bronson's preoccupation with ideas and reforms made him a poor provider, but the relationship between Louisa's parents somehow endured. In 1877, her mother, Abigail May Alcott, died in Concord. After her death Louisa wrote, "I never wish her back, but a great warmth seems gone out of life and there is no motive to go

on now. My only comfort is that I could make her last years comfortable and lift the burden she carried so bravely all these years. She was so loyal, tender and true, life was hard for her and no one understood all she had to bear but her children." (Dapper, 1993, p. 23) Bronson died in Boston on March 4, 1888, and Louisa followed him only two days later. She was fifty-five years old. A joint funeral was held, and they were buried near to each other in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord.

The March Family Stories

In 1864, Alcott published *Moods*, a serious novel for adults that was full of ideas about marriage and the social consequences of divorce. It got very negative reviews, but taught her an important lesson. After this experience, she wrote, "my next book shall have no ideas in it, only facts, and the people shall be as ordinary as possible." (MacDonald, p. 16) When the idea of writing a book for girls was suggested to her by her publisher, Thomas Niles, she replied, that she "never liked girls or knew many, except for my sisters, but our queer plays and experiences may prove interesting, though I doubt it." (Dapper, pp. 18-19) Her "next book", *Little Women, Part I*, was written in about six weeks and published in September, 1868. Drawing on her own childhood experiences, she created the March family, and after their success with the reading public, she commented in her diary "Not a bit sensational, but simple and true"; "I now find my 'Marches' sober, nice people." (MacDonald, p. 16)

Her whole family appeared in the story : her parents as Mr. and Mrs. March, and each of their four daughters with the talent she possessed in real life : Meg (Anna) loved acting, Jo (Louisa) wanted to be a writer, Beth (Elizabeth) loved music, and Amy (May) had artistic talent. The following year, she produced *Little Women, Part II (Good Wives)*, the sequel that had immediately been demanded. In 1871, she wrote *Little Men* as a tribute to John Pratt (Anna's husband, who died in 1870), and when the public called for yet another book about the March family, she started the last one, *Jo's Boys* in 1880. Unlike *Little Women*, it was very difficult for her to write, and it took her six years to finish. The models for Marmee (Mrs. March) and Amy had recently died, her own health was not good, and she had the additional responsibility of caring for her niece, Lulu. Alcott was very careful to tie up all the threads of the plot, and the book, her last novel, was published in 1886.

Alcott herself said this about the characters she created in *Little Women* :

“Facts in the story are true, though often
changed as to time and place :-

‘Little Women’- the early plays and experience ;
Beth’s death, Jo’s literary and Amy’s artistic
experiences ; Meg’s happy home ; John Brooke and
his death. Demi’s character—Mr. March did not
go to war, but Jo did. Mrs. March is all true,
only not half good enough. Laurie is not an
American boy though every lad I ever knew claims
the character. He was a Polish boy, met abroad
in 1865. Mr. Laurence is my Grandfather, Col. J.
May. Aunt March is no one.” (Dapper, p. 19)

Three other characters, Friedrich Bhaer, Dan Kean, and Dr. Nan, should also be mentioned here. The influence of both Ralph Waldo Emerson and Bronson Alcott can be seen in the character of Friedrich Bhaer, the German professor she created in *Little Women, Part II* as Jo’s future husband. Like Emerson, he was an older man, intellectual and highly moral, who guided Jo in the study of literature and encouraged her to write from her heart, and in *Little Men*, he founded a school at Plumfield based on Bronson Alcott’s educational principles. Henry David Thoreau may have been the model for Dan Kean, the wild boy who appears in *Little Men* and *Jo’s Boys*. As Thoreau-esque characters also appear in other works by Alcott, MacDonald (pp. 35-6, 62, 80-1, and 85-6) suggests that Louisa may have been romantically interested in him. Dr. Nan of *Jo’s Boys* has much in common with Louisa’s friend, Dr. Rhoda Lawrence, one of the first woman graduates of the Boston medical schools and owner of the nursing home where Louisa died.

In writing *Little Women*, Alcott started a trend toward secularizing children’s literature, but her stories are still aimed at influencing children toward the good. She is educating readers on social issues, such as sympathy for the poor and the rights of women. She demonstrates to the reader what is right moral action by posing situations in which believable characters try to puzzle out the answers for themselves. Alcott allows her children to be rebellious, mischievous, and to question things. They are children, with a unique status, not little adults.

A certain number of readers have always been disappointed by Jo's rejection of Laurie, who was closer to her in age, physically more attractive, and much wealthier than Professor Bhaer ; some critics have objected to the fact that Jo married at all, when her alter ego, the author, remained single. Older readers outgrow the sentimentality of *Little Women*, but younger ones keep the March family alive because the book has two very satisfying themes. First of all, it presents an optimistic picture of family life. Home is pictured as a warm, safe, accepting place, where the people sincerely like each other, and difficulties and disagreements can be overcome. Girls are taught about the good influence that a wife and mother should exert on her children, who will eventually grow up, marry, and have families of their own. Second, it illustrates the healthy effects of honest labor. Marriage and motherhood are the supreme vocations for women, but they also have outside interests, such as Mrs. March's social work. Jo March Bhaer, may not pick the most likely marriage partner, but she is happy with her choice, and she enjoys her teaching and writing.

Literary References in *Little Women*

In keeping with the practice of the day, Alcott made references to a number of other well-known literary works. In *Little Women, Part I*, for example, sixteenth and seventeenth century references include John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, which provides the structure of *Little Women, Part I* and will be discussed at length in a later section, Jo quoting from the dagger scene in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (p. 18), and a favorable comparison of Laurie's writing to that of Francis Bacon, John Milton, and William Shakespeare (p. 141).

Eighteenth and nineteenth century references include Jo reading *The Vicar of Wakefield* by Oliver Goldsmith (p. 61) and the works of Samuel Johnson (pp. 275-6), and Meg reading *Ivanhoe* by Sir Walter Scott (p. 67). John Brooke used Schiller's *Mary Stuart* for Meg's German lesson (p. 175), and the girls, influenced by Charles Dickens' *Pickwick Papers*, formed their own club in Chapter 10.

Jo also made very current references. She quoted Chloe, a character in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (p. 66), which preceded *Little Women* by only seven years, and, unbeknownst to her young readers, Jo's play "The Witch's Curse, an Operatic Tragedy" (p. 18) and her story "The Rival Painters" (pp. 202-3) were very much like Alcott's own melodramas and gothic short stories.

One reference in the story, however, remains a mystery. On p.12, Jo mentions wanting a book called *Undine and Sintram*, and on p.282, she is happy to have received it as a Christmas present. No listing could be found for this work in either the *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* or *The Oxford Companion to American Literature*. The closest was *Undine*, a fairy romance published in 1811 by Friedrich, baron de la Motte Fouqué.

The most important of the many literary references in the story is John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, an allegory, in which the main character, Christian, bearing a heavy burden, journeys from his home in the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, which represents heaven. Along the way, he has adventures that teach him about and test his faith. *Pilgrims's Progress* was a favorite book in the Alcott home, and when the Alcott girls were small, they sometimes "played pilgrims". Mrs. Alcott would pack them a lunch, they would strap "burdens" on their backs, and begin their journey in the basement. Travelling up through the house, they would finally reach the "Celestial City" in the attic, and their "burdens" would fall off down the stairs.

Alcott, of course, did not know that she would be writing a series of four books on the March family over a period of eighteen years. Unlike the other books in the series, which are episodic, *Little Women, Part I* was designed as a unified whole. The book starts on Christmas in the cozy circle of Mother and daughters at home while Father is away doing his duty in the American Civil War. The girls remember the fun they had "playing pilgrims" as children. Each one then identifies her "burden": Meg thinks too much of her looks and hates to work, Jo is rough and wild and cannot hold her temper, Amy is a selfish girl, and Beth, who is as near to perfection as a little girl can get, has her "dishes and dusters, envying girls with nice pianos, and being afraid of people." (p. 23) Each determines to do her best to correct her fault before Father comes home. The story ends the following Christmas. Mr. March returns, evaluates the progress his daughters have made, and declares himself pleased.

References to characters, places, and events in *Pilgrim's Progress* appear in the preface and throughout the book, but Chapters 6-9 are the most significant. In these, Alcott places her characters in real situations that test and teach them. In Chapter 6, Beth succeeds in getting past the lion (Mr. Laurence) and finds The Palace Beautiful next door in his house with the piano. In Chapter 7, Amy finds herself in the Valley of Humiliation at school by getting caught with some forbidden pickled limes. In

Chapter 8, Jo meets Apollyon when her anger at Amy for burning her manuscript nearly overrules her common sense when her sister is drowning. In Chapter 9, Meg goes to Vanity Fair when she visits the home of her rich friend and is tempted into immodest behavior.

Louisa May Alcott's "Blind-spot"

As previously mentioned, waves of immigrants from southern, eastern, and northern Europe arrived in North America during the late nineteenth century. In *Little Women, Part I* characters of various nationalities appear, and it is interesting to note the reactions of the Marches and their neighbors, all descendents of earlier Protestant English settlers, to the newcomers.

The Germans were admired and deserving of sympathy. The March girls show compassion for the Hummels, a poor German immigrant family with many children, beginning with the gift of their Christmas breakfast in Chapter 2 and by continuing to care for them throughout the story. Friedrich Bhaer, Jo's future husband, who appears in *Little Women, Part II*, is also a poor German immigrant. He is respected for his intelligence and his learning (after all, the Transcendentalists greatly admired German philosophy), and loved for his kind heart.

The French were seen as arbiters of fashion or pious Catholics. When Meg went to "Vanity Fair" at her friend Annie Moffat's house, "she began to imitate the manners and conversation of those about her; to put on little airs and graces, use French phrases, crimp her hair, take in her dresses, and talk about the fashions as well as she could." (p. 117) Later, when she was wearing a low-cut party dress, make-up, and high-heeled boots, she was complimented on being "quite French" (p. 124). In Chapter 19, while Amy was staying at Aunt March's house during Beth's illness, she became acquainted with Esther, the Frenchwoman who had served Aunt March for many years. Esther had agreed to change her name from Estelle at Aunt March's request, on condition that she never be asked to change her religion. Esther encouraged Amy to pray every day, and gave her a rosary. Amy did not use it, however, because she felt "more than doubtful as to its fitness for Protestant prayers." (p. 253)

The Italians were considered to be unsuitable matches. In Chapter 3, we find out that Laurie had lived in Europe and speaks other languages besides English. In Chapter 5, we find out about his parents, and why Old Mr. Laurence does not like

Laurie to play the piano. Mrs. March explained that Mr. Laurence's son, "Laurie's father, married an Italian lady, a musician, which displeased the old man, who is very proud. The lady was good and lovely and accomplished, but he did not like her, and never saw his son after he married." (p.79) The implication is that Mr. Laurence objected to her because she was Italian.

The British were patronizing and cheated at games. In Chapter 12, Laurie had some guests from England, the Vaughns, that he had known when he lived abroad, and he invited the March girls and some other friends to spend a day with them. Fred, one of the English boys cheated at croquet, and he and Jo trade insults : " 'We don't cheat in America, but you can, if you choose,' said Jo, angrily. 'Yankees are a deal the most tricky, everybody knows. There you go !' returned Fred, croqueting her ball far away." (p. 165) When Kate Vaughn, the eldest, found out that Meg worked as a governess, she said, "We have many most respectable and worthy young women who do the same, and are employed by the nobility, because, being the daughters of gentlemen, they are both well-bred and accomplished, you know," in a tone that made Meg feel that her work, which she did not particularly enjoy anyway, was even more distasteful and degrading. (p. 175)

The Irish were disliked. In Chapter 7, Amy's teacher, Mr. Davis, made her throw her pickled limes out the window of the school. As she did so, "a shout from the street completed the anguish of the girls, for it told them that their feast was being exulted over by the little Irish children, their sworn foes." (p.94) According to MacDonald, Alcott's dislike of the Irish stems from a period the family spent in Boston, where her mother had gotten a position as a social worker for \$600 a year. Mrs. Alcott had a bad impression of her Irish clients, and called them, "shiftless, lazy, and dirty. (and) . . . unwilling to help themselves." (p. 3) The reference to the Irish is made only in passing in *Little Women*, but MacDonald points out that Alcott was also negative about the Irish in other books, such as her novel *Work*. She commented that the Alcotts were "a remarkably open-minded family, supporting abolition, women's rights, and philanthropy, especially for working women, their one blind spot was the Irish." (p. 4)

Alcott's Other Works

Alcott's work may be divided into three categories, stories for children and

serious novels for adults published under her own name, and gothic short stories, which she published anonymously or under the name A.M. Barnard.

In addition to the four books in the March family series, she wrote the following novels for children: *Flower Fables* (1854, her first book, a collection of stories originally written for Ellen Emerson), *An Old-Fashioned Girl* (1870), *Eight Cousins* and its sequel *Rose in Bloom* (1875 and 1876, the most successful of these other juvenile works), *Under the Lilacs* (1878), and *Jack and Jill* (1880).

Her serious novels for adults include: *Hospital Sketches* (1863, which brought her attention as a skilled writer), *Moods* (1864, her favorite novel, written in a "vortex" of fevered composition), *Work* (1873, her most successful novel for adults), and *A Modern Mephistophiles* (1877).

Other collections of stories published under her own name include: *Aunt Jo's Scrapbag*, 6 volumes (1872-82), *Silver Pitchers and Independence* (1876, which contains "Transcendental Wild Oats", about her father's experiment at Fruitlands), *Proverb Stories* (1882), *Spinning-Wheel Stories* (1884), *Lulu's Library*, 3 volumes (1886-89), and *A Garland for Girls* (1888).

Alcott did not always use her own name on her work, however. As a young woman, she wrote poetry, under the name Flora Fairfield, and in 1862, she won a \$100 prize from a magazine for "Pauline's Passion and Punishment", which was published anonymously. She also wrote a number of "potboilers" under the name A.M. Barnard. These sensational stories, written for popular magazines, were generally about premeditated crimes and involved incest, bigamy, deception, returns from the grave, deception, and other violations of Victorian norms.

A few years after Louisa's death, her sister Anna published *Comic Tragedies* (1893), a collection of the melodramas written by Louisa and acted by the Alcott sisters. It contains "Norna; or, The Witch's Curse" and "The Unloved Wife".

In 1943, a rare book collector found a series of letters between Louisa and the publisher of a popular magazine that established a previously unknown link between Alcott and the name A.M. Barnard. This discovery led to the publication of several collections of her gothic stories in the last twenty years and has done much to rekindle interest in her work. They include: *Behind a Mask: The Unknown Thrillers of Louisa May Alcott* (1975), *Plots and Counterplots: More Unknown Thrillers of Louisa May Alcott* (1976), *A Double Life: Newly Discovered Thrillers of Louisa May Alcott* (1988), and *Freaks of Genius: Unknown Thrillers of Louisa May Alcott* (1991). According to

The Japan Times, another previously unknown work entitled *A Long Fatal Love Chase* will be published in 1995.

Alcott's work is also well known in Japan. *Little Women*, the first of her books to be translated into Japanese, appeared in Taisho 12 (1923) under the title 「四少女」 (*Yonshoujo*). In Showa 9 (1934), it was published under its most familiar title, 「若草物語」 (*Wakakusa Monogatari*).

Conclusion

Louisa May Alcott had an ambivalent attitude toward her juvenile works, but she would probably be no more than a footnote in American literary history without them. She began her career writing for adults, and always maintained that she preferred writing for them, feelings that may have been affected by the fact that serious writers of her day did not write for children, and only serious works for adults received real literary recognition. It was *Little Women*, however, that brought her fame, and the continued publication of juvenile works that gave her the financial security that she craved. Her serious novels for adults form a bridge between Louisa May Alcott, “the children’s friend” and A.M. Barnard, writer of gothic stories, but they are mostly forgotten. *Little Women* has stood the test of time.

Addendum : A Literary Pilgrimage

In August, 1994, I accompanied a group of Seisen Jogakuin College students to West Hartford, Connecticut, for the three-week Summer English Program at Saint Joseph College. It was my first trip to New England. During this time, I was able to make a literary pilgrimage to Concord, Massachusetts, to visit places associated with Louisa May Alcott and the Transcendentalists.

The town of Concord (population 17,100) is about thirty kilometers northwest of Boston. It was incorporated in 1635, just fifteen years after the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, and, as the site of the second skirmish of the Revolutionary War, is one of the most famous towns in American history. It is also known for the “Concord grape”, the foremost native American grape variety, which was developed in Concord by Ephraim W. Bull, a neighbor of the Alcotts, in 1843. The people of Concord have worked hard to retain its ties with the past and maintain the beauty of its natural

surroundings. Louisa May Alcott would probably still feel quite at home there.

Two of the houses formerly owned by the Alcott family in Concord, The Wayside and Orchard House, are open to the public. They are located near to each other on the Lexington Road, not far from Ralph Waldo Emerson's house and a pleasant walking distance from Walden Pond.

The Wayside was built in 1717. It has been occupied by many people over the years, including three famous authors. At the time of the Revolutionary War, for example, Samuel Whitney, the Muster Master for the Concord Minutemen, lived there. The Alcotts moved into The Wayside (then known as "Hillside") in 1845, when Louisa was twelve years old, and stayed there for about three years. She and her sisters had many of the adventures she later wrote about in *Little Women* while they were living there. In 1852, they sold the house to Nathaniel Hawthorne, who gave it its present name and owned it until 1870. In 1883, the house was purchased by Harriet Lothrop, who is better known as Margaret Sidney, author of *The Five Little Peppers and How They Grew*. The Wayside remained the property of the Lothrop family until it was sold to the National Park Service in 1965.

Close by The Wayside is Orchard House, the home of the Alcotts from 1858 until 1877. It did not rate even one star in the *Michelin Guide to New England*, but it is worth the maximum three stars to anyone interested in the family. In September, 1857, Bronson Alcott, with the help of friends, bought twelve acres of land. The two buildings on the property, a late-seventeenth century manor house and an early eighteenth century tenant building, were in disrepair. It took about a year to join them and create a liveable structure, full of interesting nooks and crannies, but somehow suited to the eccentric character of the owner. Sadly, Elizabeth died in March, 1858, a few months before the family moved in. Orchard House is decorated in the style of the late nineteenth century, and visitors can see many items that belonged to the Alcotts. Of greatest interest to me was the trunk containing costumes the Alcott girls had used for the plays they staged in the dining room. It was also touching to see the melodeon that had belonged to Elizabeth, artwork by May, and Louisa's room, with her inkstand on the desk where she wrote *Little Women*.

In 1900, Harriet Lothrop, who was living next door at The Wayside, purchased Orchard House with the intention of turning it into a museum. This became a reality in 1911, when the Louisa May Alcott Memorial Association was formed. Today, Orchard House serves as an educational center offering guided tours of the house,

living history programs, workshops, lectures, and special performances.

The Concord School of Philosophy is on the grounds of Orchard House. The building was designed by Bronson Alcott and built in 1880. Since 1976, it has again been used every summer for a conversational series with lectures on history, literature, and philosophy.

Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, on Bedford Street (Route 62), is the final resting place of the famous writers of the Concord Renaissance. They are all buried together on Author's Ridge : the Alcotts (Louisa's grave has a star denoting her service in the Civil War), Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson (whose grave is marked by a large boulder). I visited the cemetery near dusk on a late summer day, when there was no one else around. The ancient trees, the moss, and the silence all contributed to a feeling of poignant nostalgia for a bygone era, when those who are now so quiet were full of life and words, words, words.

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